

From Lake to River and River to Lake: Ktunaxa Use of the Kootenay River Floodplain



Introduction & Acknowledgements

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Acknowledgements

Robert Williams, Cultural Researcher, Ktunaxa Nation Council

Don Sam, Director, Traditional Knowledge and Language Sector, Ktunaxa Nation Council

Natasha Burgoyne; Interviewer, Ktunaxa Nation Council

Craig Candler, Director, The Firelight Group, Victoria BC

All of the Ktunaxa Knowledge Holders and Elders who are continuing to provide expertise, advice and guidance

Kootenay River as a part of Creation

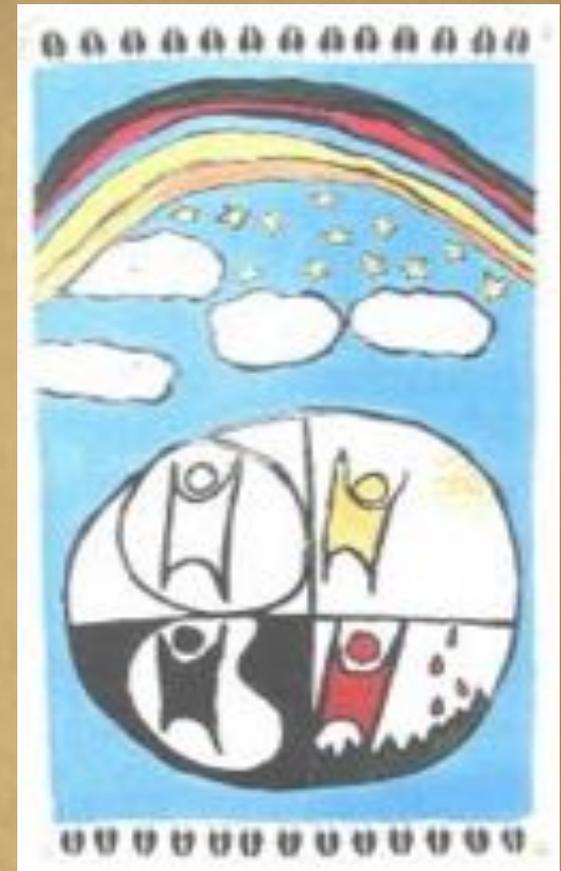
- » The Kootenay River is a key part of ongoing creation – bringing life to lands, waters and all living things.
- » Ktunaxa Creation Story provides context
- » <http://www.ktunaxa.org/who-we-are/creation-story/>

- » In ancestral times, there was a sea monster, Yawun?ik', killing many animals. The Chief Animal, a giant named Nałmuqçin, led a party to destroy Yawun?ik'
- » At that time, the Kootenay River and Columbia River were joined at Columbia lake
- » The war party chased Yawun?ik' around from the Kootenay River, through the Columbia and back through the Kootenay, and could not seem to catch him

- » A wise old one named Kikum was watching the chase, and told Nałmuqçin to use his size and strength to block the Kootenay River from Columbia Lake.
- » Nałmuqçin did this, and trapped Yawun?ik, and the red headed woodpecker killed him



- » Nałmuqçin then took different parts of Yawunʔik and created different races of human beings.
- » Through this story, Ktunaxa understand the flow of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers define Ktunaxa ʔamakʔis and that the Kootenay River is part of the creation of the Ktunaxa people



Koocanusa/Libby Reservoir

- » From the place where Nałmuqçin divided the Rivers, the Kootenay flows south past ʔakinkumłasnułiʔit (Tobacco Plains) and south towards Libby, Montana.
- » The River in this area was flooded in 1972 by the Libby Dam, and is now referred to as Lake Koocanusa



- » The flooding of this area has caused many unforeseen impacts; including how the Ktunaxa relate to and use the River, which is now a “lake”
- » In the past, the flood plain was important agricultural area for tobacco, range land for wild horses, and the river was important for fishing

- » Critical fish harvest and spawning areas were flooded
- » Acres of ungulate range were destroyed
- » Ktunaxa have had to attempt to adapt to the change to the River in this area, but still retain their connection to and knowledge of the way it used to be

“The only others (activities) we were doing was
ber-- picking berries, I guess, before the flood --
before they flooded it out.”

- Ktunaxa Knowledge Holder

Reference to the town of Waldo, now underwater:

“[the Ktunaxa name for that place] I think it had to do with clay. It’s describing the – like the hillside... there used to be a place where they went and they drive deer out during hunting time”

- Ktunaxa Elder

Elder: “There used to be a lot of horses at one point.”

Interviewer: “Is there places along here that were important for horse pasture... I guess [along] Kootenay River at the time? Do you remember where the horses used to be?”

Elder: “I think they were all over, the wild ones ... That’s kind of a sad story for me”.

Adaptation: Use in the Koocanusa Area Today

- » Recreation: Dorr Creek Recreational Site; Big Springs Campground
- » Ice Fishing for Ling for winter ceremonies are now caught in Koocanusa
- » Maintain hunting and fishing, gathering, camping

“What my grandfather handed down. What I learnt over time was Kootenay Lake ... is the bloodlines of our people, it is the heartbeat of the Lower Kootenay. All the streams and creeks that go into Kootenay Lake and leave are the arteries. That's what feeds our people. How does it feed our people? By the fish, by the berries that grow near it, by certain roots, certain plants. That's what feeds our people. That's why Kootenay Lake and the tributaries is very important.”

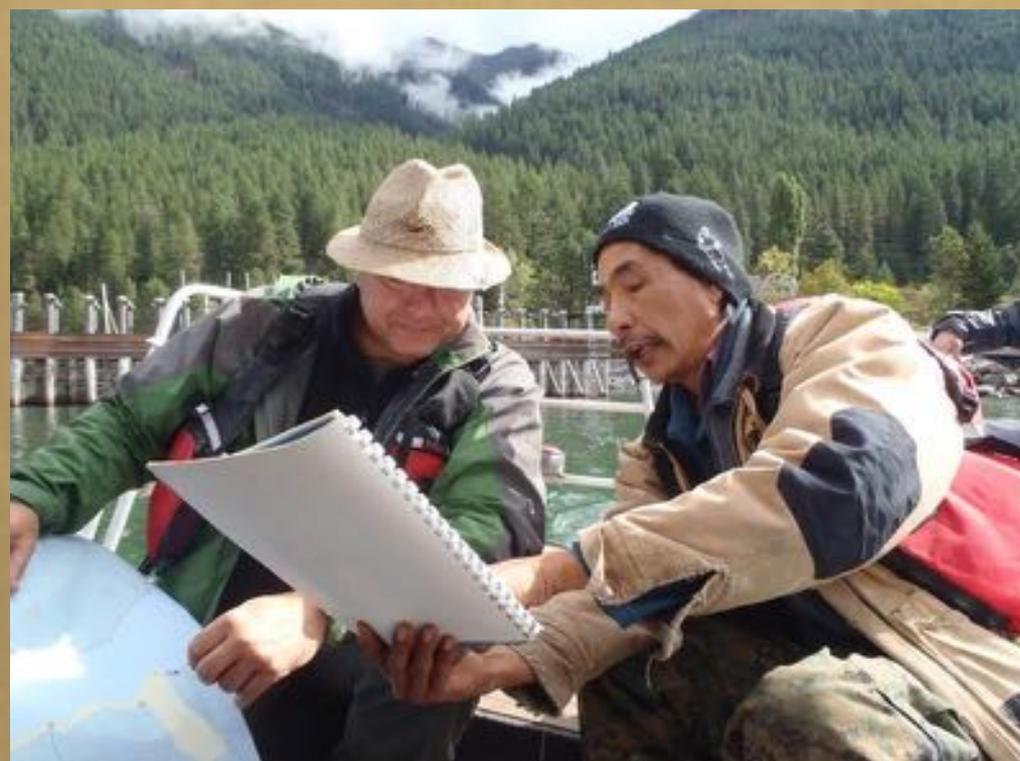
- Ktunaxa Elder

Kootenay River – Kootenay Lake

- » After flowing through the Libby dam the Kootenay flows into Idaho and up into Canada, passing through Yakan Nukiy (Lower Kootenay) and into Kootenay Lake.

» Productive wetlands at the North and South ends of the lake, renewed through annual flooding, were central to Ktunaxa cultural practice – fishing for kokanee, sturgeon and other fish, hunting of deer in grass lands, ducks, geese and other water fowl, egg collection, and harvesting a wide range of plants.

» Flooding brings life – sustaining medicines and cultural plants as well as kokanee, sturgeon and other beings in the wetlands and downstream into the Columbia.



- The cultural landscape – shaped by flooding - is central to teaching and passing on Ktunaxa knowledge and language.

Blocking Rivers, Draining Lakes

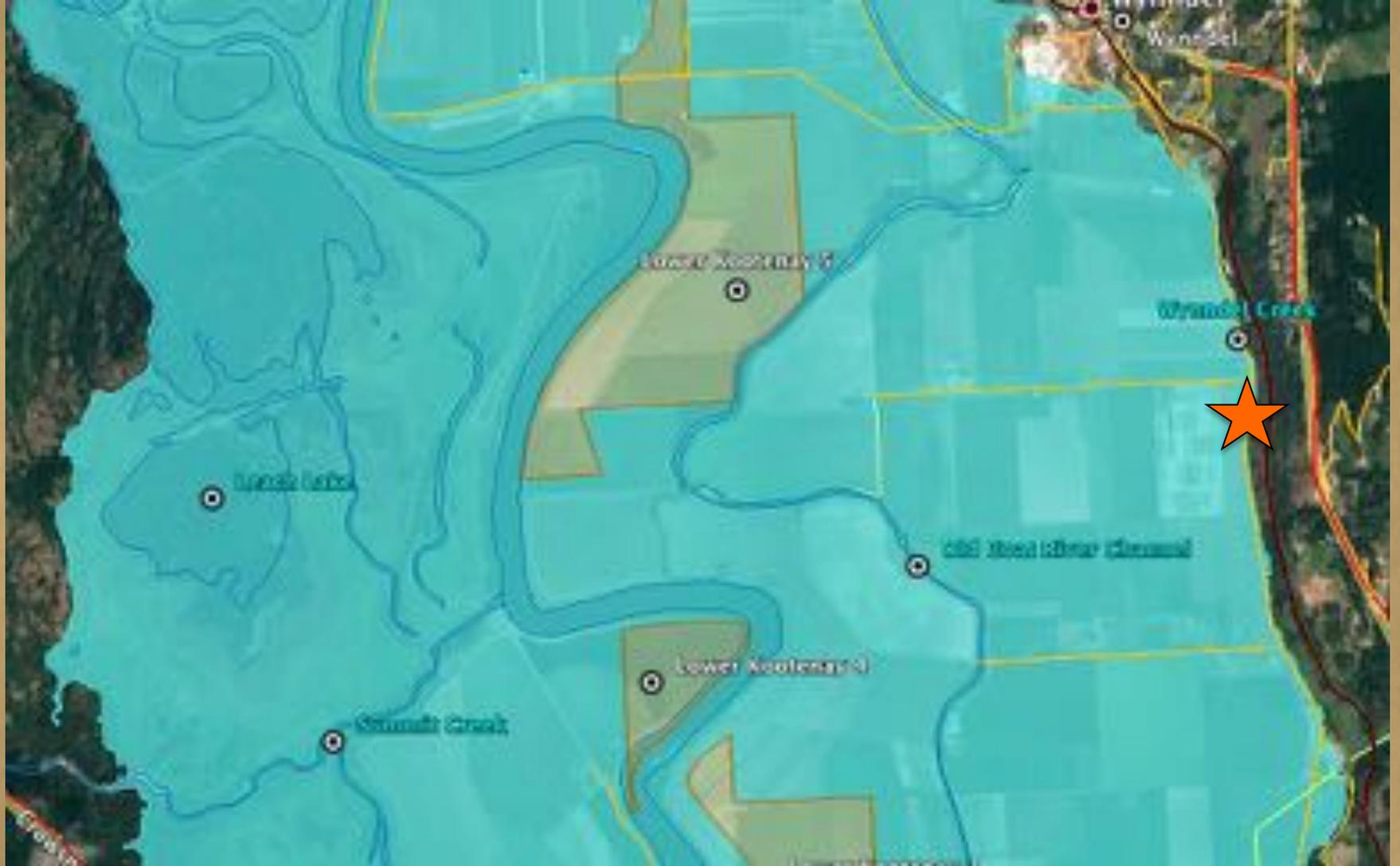
- » Hydro-dams, dykes and other structures block the natural flow and cycle of the Kootenay River interfering with natural processes.
- » Dynamic wetlands and flood plains have been turned into towns, fields and farmlands in the Creston Valley
- » Ktunaxa knowledge reminds us of where the lake and wetlands **should be** rather than where it is.



“...I remember being in the canoe with my grandparents...we used to move back and forth with the water, staying up in the village when the water got high, and move right back down to the river when it went down...”

- Ktunaxa Elder





Closing

- » Through interview and fieldwork, the Ktunaxa Nation are collecting information to ensure that stewardship and management work is based in Ktunaxa Values



“The foundation of the Ktunaxa’s philosophy of stewardship of lands and resources is our recognition that we are a part of the land. Our understanding of our connectedness requires that we have respect for all things as anything that affects one, affects everything else”

- Qat’muk Declaration

“Water is very meaningful, it's not just for your drinking but it's very meaningful in so many different ways and it just makes sense than that, yes, there would be a lot of sacred areas, you know up and down the lake, on both sides of the lake for that matter”

- Ktunaxa Elder